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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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[ ] ICRO;  
McClintock file

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Highlights of Symington Sub-Committee Session  
on Thailand -- Monday, November 10, 1969

DISTRIBUTION:

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J

J/RM - Amb. McClintock

S/S

EA - Amb. Green

- Amb. Unger

- Mr. Moore

- Mr. Tanham

- Mr. Montgomery

EA/TB - Mr. Starbird

- Mr. Dexter

PM - Mr. Spiers

S/PC - Mr. Cargo

H - Amb. Torbert

L/EA - Mr. Futterman

WH - Mr. Ehrlichman

- Mr. Mollenhoff

NSC - Mr. Lehman

DOD - Mr. Knaur

- Mr. French

CIA - Mr. [ ]

NSA - Mr. [ ]

PM/JW - Mr. Wolf

Amb. Martin

S/PC - Mr. Seligmann

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Summary

For the first time since the hearings commenced,  
all members of the Subcommittee were present at some time

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during the course of the day (Senators Javits and Case made their initial appearances).

Senator Symington at the outset read a prepared statement announcing that the publication of the transcript of the Philippine hearings would be postponed until the following week, inasmuch as the Department of State had changed its mind in regard to portions of the transcript which it had initially cleared for release.

Ambassador Unger read his prepared oral statement in which the US role in Thailand and Thailand's part in collective security arrangements were put in perspective; he placed into the record an extensive prepared statement responding to the questions submitted in advance by the Subcommittee Chairman.

Senator Javits asked about the extent of the US commitment in response to external and internal situations in Thailand, and whether the mere presence of US forces and bases in Thailand did not place a "stop-loss" on Thai counterinsurgency activities. He asked for affirmation of his understanding that there were two levels of US commitment: response to external attacks; and consultation with the Thai Government, if insurgency

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situations so required. Ambassador Unger clarified that our obligation was to respond only to Communist external attacks, and, answering a follow-up question by Counsel, noted that the Thais were serious about coping with CI situations themselves. Moreover, it did not appear likely that insurgency would develop to the point that the Thais could not handle it. In response to Senator Javits' question whether the writ of the Thai Government extended throughout the country, Ambassador Unger said there was awareness everywhere of the authority of the Government, and despite poor access to some remote areas, no part of the country might be regarded as separatist.

Ambassador Unger responded to Counsel's question about Thailand's importance to US interests by noting its strategic geographical location, its importance to communications and transportation, and our broader interest in preserving the rule of law. Senator Symington thereupon asked a series of questions implying that we were not concerned about the rule of law in South Vietnam, Laos, Greece or Taiwan.

Senator Fulbright asked for evidence of Chinese Communist aggression against Thailand, and remarked that Ambassador Unger's description of road-building, propaganda,

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and training of insurgents "sounds like the same things we do." He asked whether the US was just concerned about Communism, whether the Thais were really independent, and whether their government was democratic. He suggested that the real reason the US was involved in Thailand was to resist Communism in Vietnam. Ambassador Unger pointed out the historic Thai concern for their independence and said that Thailand was democratic in basic respects even if the Thai held their own concepts and convictions, not necessarily consistent with our concepts in every way.

Senator Fulbright asked whether our activities in Thailand had not built up into a new commitment contrary to earlier US pronouncements that we would not get involved in a land war in Asia. Senator Symington, turning to a favorite theme repeatedly touched upon during the first two days, said he was shocked at the attitude of witnesses toward the cost of US programs, inasmuch as the US "is going broke;" he declined to acknowledge the distinction drawn between programs in Thailand related to Thai security and those related to the war in Vietnam.

Senator Fulbright opened an extensive discussion on the Taksin contingency plan, citing an updating of the plan in

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August 1969, which said that "the US and Thailand Governments have agreed" in regard to the updated plan.

Ambassador Unger pointed out that this was a routine updating of the plan at a technical level and did not constitute a new agreement: the only security agreement we had with Thailand was SEATO. Senator Javits said that what was needed from the new Administration was assurance that no Congressional power would be waived either in actions to meet overt attack or in consultation in regard to other situations or contingency plans. He and Senator Cooper asked whether Thanat was aware of our constitutional process and whether the Thais considered the contingency plan to apply automatically. Ambassador Unger assured them that Thanat was fully familiar with our constitution and appreciated the role of Congress.

Senator Fulbright asked about the arrangements with Thailand in regard to payment for Thai troops sent to Vietnam and why Ambassador Unger's letter containing these arrangements could not be made public. It was explained that most of the content was known to the public, but that the letter was considered a delicate matter by both

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governments and was related to arrangements with other countries. He pointed out that the Subcommittee had been informed about the letter as far back as December 1967. Senators Fulbright and Symington suggested that the US was doing all sorts of things about which they were unaware until they came to light in the Subcommittee hearings.

The US was conducting secret warfare under the pretense that it was part of its SEATO commitment. Ambassador Unger responded negatively to Counsel's question as to whether the Rusk-Thanat communique added to the SEATO commitment.

Toward the beginning of the afternoon session, a confrontation developed in regard to subjects which witnesses were instructed not to discuss in the hearings. Counsel asked whether there was political significance to the feature of the Taksin contingency plan calling for deployment of forces into Laos. When Ambassador Unger said he had no authority to discuss the matter because it was connected with the content of the plans, Senator Symington asked for the source for this authority. He was informed the instruction came from Ambassador McClintock as the coordinator of preparations for the hearings; the latter, in turn, said that he acted on the instructions of the

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Secretary of State. Senator Symington complained that there was more in the press than he was able to obtain at the hearings and noted that the plan had been made available to the Subcommittee and its staff and had been disavowed by the Secretary of Defense.

In response to further questioning, Ambassador McClintock said that his instructions came from the President, who had indicated three things: nuclear weapons anywhere in the world and contingency plans could not be discussed, and information in regard to CIA activities [ ] and Laos would be discussed only by the Director of CIA. The Senator argued that this particular plan (Taksin) had been made available to the Subcommittee, and Ambassador McClintock undertook to reopen the question. The Ambassador further agreed to convey Senator Fulbright's request for a legal memorandum on invoking executive privilege. Senator Symington said that in his conversation with the President he had agreed that CIA operations would be discussed only by the head of that agency, and that nuclear weapons would not be discussed for the particular country concerned at the time. He had further agreed not to take up contingency plans, but that did not include this particular plan, which was already

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available. Senator Fulbright said that he regarded Taksin as an agreement and said that the US was already doing many of the things it called for.

Further questions in regard to commitments concerned the reaction of other SEATO countries to the Rusk-Thanat communique (answer: no objection); the US "moral commitment" to come to the defense of Thailand in the light of our bases (answer: we have a legal commitment in the event of attack); whether the US had a greater commitment to Thailand than other countries had under SEATO (answer: perhaps a lesser, inasmuch as we are committed only in the event of a Communist attack).

Senator Symington asked a number of questions intended to show that the Thais were not carrying as much defense burden as they should in terms of budget, percentage of armed forces in Vietnam, and foreign-exchange position. He said that he liked the Thais, but only the Koreans pulled their share of the load. Ambassador Unger pointed out that 25 percent of the Thai budget was devoted to defense and 14 percent of their Army was in Vietnam and that the amount of money flowing into the Thai economy as the result of Vietnam has steadily dropped while Thailand's

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foreign-exchange position is no longer improving. The Ambassador attempted to note the pressing internal situation which the Thai had to consider in allocating resources for defense. Ambassador Unger explained why the US did not have a status of forces agreement with Thailand and how we were in many respects better off on the basis of our informal arrangement.

In response to a description of plans for withdrawing forces from Thailand, Senator Symington asked why we were not reducing forces related to the Vietnam war more drastically instead of stepping up sorties in Laos.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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MEMORANDUM

November 12, 1969

SUBJECT: Highlights of Symington Subcommittee Session on  
Thailand (2) - Tuesday, November 11, 1969

Senator Mansfield asked a number of questions in regard to the air war in Laos intended to indicate that North Vietnam had failed to withdraw from Laos in 1962, thereby violating the Geneva Accords. Counsel asked about the role of civilian military advisors to the Meo, and Ambassador Unger replied there were none in violation of the Accords. Senator Symington said that, the more he heard, it seemed that we were sanctimonious about our actions, and suggested that if Souvanna Phouma had French advisors, the Pathet Lao might feel entitled to have help from North Vietnam.

When Counsel asked for a copy of the US Air Defense Agreement, Ambassador Unger referred the question to General Pettit, who said he was instructed not to supply it. The matter was thereupon dropped and received no further attention.

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Counsel asked whether the Thais considered US bases a guarantee that we would come to their assistance, and was informed by Ambassador Unger that they looked rather to the SEATO treaty for help. Senator Symington pursued the previous day's questions about the threat to Thailand, and asked the witnesses whether they were aware of any Chinese Communist plan to attack Thailand at any time. He was given much the same information as was supplied on the first day.

Counsel asked whether increased US economic assistance reflected the US military build-up, and was told that economic aid was related to the insurgency situation in Thailand. Senator Symington complained about the Senators' lack of knowledge in regard to the details of military construction and cited an appropriation bill for \$700 million military construction in Southeast Asia, of which over \$100 million was intended for Thailand. It was rammed through Congress in 1965 with no information on how the money would be spent. Counsel asked whether roads presumably built for the war in Vietnam were not really built with Thailand's development in mind. Ambassador Unger noted that any side benefits of this sort were incidental.

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Senator Cooper said that past actions in Thailand were understandable, but he was interested in how the US would wind down its activities in Thailand in relation to the war in Vietnam. He went on to ask a number of questions about what Thailand was doing for domestic development and appeared much interested in Ambassador Unger's resume of projects in regard to credit facilities for farmers, market-access roads, rural security, medical programs, education, etc. In the course of this exposition, Senator Fulbright stood up and suggested to Senator Cooper that the line of his questions lacked substance. Senator Cooper, somewhat irritated, replied that he found the information useful and noted that he did not obtain this sort of data in the Appropriation Committee hearings.

Senator Fulbright did some quick calculation to indicate that the US is spending three times the percentage of GNP on its military budget as is Thailand. He placed into the record the SFRC report on the SEATO treaty hearings in 1955 to show that the Senate was then assured by Secretary Dulles that the President would come to Congress if any threat developed requiring US action. Now, he charged, the administration pleaded executive privilege in regard to a contingency plan,

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much of which had already been implemented. This was probably the fault of the bureaucracy, which could not be controlled. Ambassador Unger again noted that the Committee was informed about the Taskin plan three years ago.

Senator Fulbright asked to have supplied for the record the accumulated total of all US "contributions" to Thailand. He said we were not concerned about Thailand's independence, but would stay there as long as China remained Communist. Ambassador Unger said this was not so: even if the threat continued, our purpose was to get the Thais in a position to help themselves.

In regard to insurgency, Senator Fulbright asked to have supplied for the record the number of Chinese and North Vietnamese in Thailand, the number of Thais under arms, the number of US forces under arms, and "the cost for them and for us."

Senator Case asked whether in developing the port of Sattahip the US had in mind its taking the place of Singapore. Ambassador Unger said that the port was developed to relieve overcrowding in Bangkok and to support air operations. While it had the potential to develop into a major naval port this was not the intention, and at this stage the port was far

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from having the facilities of Singapore.

At the beginning of the afternoon session, Counsel asked a number of questions about air operations, local base security, and ceilings on American forces in Thailand. When he asked General Seith how many Americans would be required to man a "standby base" in the event we reduced operations substantially, he was informed it would take 200-400, but General Seith declined to provide further details on the ground that he was not authorized to discuss "T-Day" planning. Senator Symington interposed that this was not contingency planning as he understood it and requested Mr. Knauer to obtain a clarification from the Secretary of Defense.

Questions directed to Colonel Bartell about the role of US special forces in Thailand developed no particular controversy.

In the course of further questions about the USAF role, Senator Symington called attention to the second paragraph of the President's November 3 speech, in which the President acknowledged the right of the US public to know what its government was doing and why. He said it was "a lot of cockeyed nonsense to deny bombing [of Laos] from Thailand"

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when there were hundreds of US airmen on the streets of Bangkok. Counsel then asked about T-28 missions flown by Americans and especially about planes used with interchangeable insignia. General Seith said that no US planes were used in CI operations in Thailand or in combat, but noted that this was getting into a sensitive area. Senator Symington asked for a clarification in regard to instructions about testimony on air operations in Thailand run by the USAF. He said that Mr. Helms had not testified on what the US was doing out of Thailand. Senator Symington asked Ambassador McClintock about his instructions in regard to such testimony and was informed that the Secretary of State had said Thai operations would be discussed by the Director of CIA. Senator Symington asked whether the Secretary had included USAF operations and demanded a clarification. He was supported by Senator Javits.

General Pettit testified in detail in regard to recent air operations in Laos, which contributed to the success of the government forces. Coming back to this testimony later, Senator Symington complained about the way in which the military had been shackled in Vietnam and wondered why, if we were successful in Laos, we could not publicize our efforts.

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When informed that we refrained from doing so at Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma's request, Senator Javits asked why we could not get Souvanna to certify to Communist violations of the Geneva Accords and to indicate that he had asked for outside assistance in view of such violations. Ambassador Unger agreed that there was a strong argument for getting the story before the public, but the fact remained that the North Vietnamese did not acknowledge their acts publicly.

Senator Symington, returning to the question of the T-28s, asked Mr. Knaur whether Defense had been instructed not to testify on USAF operation of aircraft in Thailand. Mr. Knaur said he had not been so instructed. When it became clear that the Senator was referring to USAF operations and not Thai operations, Ambassador Unger indicated that there had been a misunderstanding in this regard. Senator Symington said he would clear up the record to show that information had not been withheld. The Chairman said that he had noted some differences in the course of the hearings thus far between the testimony on Laos and the testimony on Thailand, but that he regarded these as honest differences.

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Counsel asked that the witnesses consider in advance of the third day's hearings the question: How does the large US military presence in Thailand impinge on the ability of the State Department to form foreign policy?

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